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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 004137

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STATE FOR EAP/PMBS, INR/EAP, S/CT
NSC FOR GREEN

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [PTER](#) [RP](#) [NL](#) [NO](#)

SUBJECT: COMMUNISTS COMMIT TO FORMAL TALKS BUT BREAKTHROUGH
UNLIKELY

REF: MANILA 3632

Classified By: Political Officer Joseph Saus for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary. After painting themselves in a corner, the National Democratic Front (NDF) -- the negotiating arm of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its armed wing the New People's Army (NPA) -- has agreed to resume formal talks, though an exact date is yet to be determined. The GRP reinstated its security guarantees that were set to lapse on September 3. Norwegian facilitation efforts and shuttle diplomacy proved effective in bringing both sides together to commit to a resumption of formal talks. These commitments, however, are a far cry from a lasting peace agreement as the sides will need to settle the contentious issues of a permanent ceasefire and (given the current domestic political climate) a difficult-to-implement social and economic reform agenda. End Summary

Norwegians Greasing The Skids

2. (C) On September 6, poloff met with Norwegian First Secretary Larissa Kosanovic to discuss the recent impasse in

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the GRP-NDF peace talks (reftel). Kosanovic stressed Oslo's view that the NDF "really painted themselves in a corner" in pulling out of peace talks with the GRP by declaring they would only resume negotiations with a follow on regime after Arroyo was impeached. Kosanovic agreed the NDF badly overplayed its hand. Several ranking CPP/NPA/NDF officials were facing arrest resulting from the GRP's suspension of the NDF's security and immunity guarantees. Norway, the third party facilitator, sent a delegation to Manila in mid-August to gauge GRP sentiments and then hosted informal consultations August 28-30 to bring together mid-level officials from each side.

Groping For Deliverables

3. (C) Kosanovic said even with a return to negotiations, there are several (all too familiar) sticking points. One issue is that the two sides have disparate ideas regarding a negotiated ceasefire. Kosanovic stated the NDF is pulling for a phased or piece-meal ceasefire, while the GRP has stressed that it prefers a lasting, comprehensive, and nationwide ceasefire. The wider socio-economic reforms that form the keystone of the NDF's demands remain difficult to discuss, let alone implement, according to Kosanovic.

All Parties Ready To Resume Formal Talks

4. (SBU) The Norwegian Foreign Ministry on September 2 and the GRP Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) on September 5 issued separate positive statements noting that formal talks will resume at a yet undetermined date. The GRP's statement specifically notes the withdrawal of its suspension of the security and immunity guarantees, which should have taken effect on September 3. The GRP statement also says the parties have agreed to a nationwide joint ceasefire during, and in connection with, the days when formal peace negotiations are held. National Security Adviser Norberto Gonzales hinted to the media on August 30 that formal talks would resume soon.

5. (SBU) For its part, the NDF announced its receipt of the GRP's withdrawal of suspension. On the CPP/NPA/NDF's website on September 3, the NDF's Chief International Representative, Utrecht-based Luis Jalandoni, stressed opposition to the USG's listing of the CPP/NPA as a Foreign Terrorist Organization, but added the NDF's willingness to further discuss the resumption of formal talks and other issues such as a "joint ceasefire of short duration." (Note: In its public statements, the NDF typically raises the FTO listing

as an example of "foreign interference." End Note.)

Comment: No Real Breakthrough

16. (C) The talks seem to be back where they were several months ago, before President Arroyo's political troubles put her on the ropes in the Communists' eyes. A return to the negotiating table is always a welcome development, but there are no indications of any breakthrough, given the daylight between the GRP and the NDF on key issues such as a permanent ceasefire and wider socio-economic reforms. End Comment.

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